



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Building Rigorous Evidence About What Works in Prosecution

Overview

The Laura and John Arnold Foundation (LJAF) is a 501(c)(3) private foundation, whose core objective is to improve the lives of individuals by strengthening our social, governmental, and economic systems.

LJAF's Criminal Justice initiative aims to reduce crime, increase public safety, and ensure that the criminal justice system operates as fairly and cost-effectively as possible. In order to achieve these goals, we are seeking to expand the use of data, rigorous evaluation and research, and evidence-based policymaking in criminal justice. One of our primary areas of focus is the front end of the criminal justice system – the period that runs from the time a defendant is arrested through sentencing. The decisions made during this phase have significant impacts on individuals and communities.

During this stage, prosecutors have arguably the most say in determining how a case proceeds and is resolved. However, prosecution has been the subject of remarkably little social science research. Indeed, there is a dearth of rigorous, evidence-based studies that focus on prosecutorial programs, practices, procedures, and quality. Such research is critical if we are to more fully understand the nature of the issues and implement potential solutions.

We will invest in projects that allow us to fundamentally examine and assess the role of the prosecutor in the criminal justice system, not just describe and modify the prosecutorial process (although that may be a good first step).

This Request for Proposals is soliciting research and evaluation project proposals. First, we are seeking proposals to conduct randomized controlled trials (RCTs) that are designed to build policy-important evidence about “what works” in prosecution. In other words, what prosecutorial policies, procedures, and practices decrease overall crime, promote fairness in the system, improve victim satisfaction, and reduce wrongful convictions.

Second, recognizing that many innovative ideas within prosecution may not be ready for RCTs until they can be successfully piloted in real community settings (or may not be ethically viable as an RCT), we are also soliciting proposals to faithfully implement and study small-scale prosecutorial interventions that are supported by compelling logic.

Given this lack of research on prosecutors' offices, there are many important topics that are unanswered, and we know little about how they work or how their role can be improved. Thus, LJAF is seeking to substantially expand the evidence base in this area by funding rigorous research into specific prosecutorial practices, policies, and programs, as well as evaluations of specific programs; efforts to improve data collection; and ways to identify and scale programs that are proven to work. Some potential topics of

interest include: Which prosecutorial diversions work – and at what point are diversion decisions most effectively made? How can prosecutors overcome implicit bias? How can optimal charging, plea, and sentencing decisions be made? Does prosecutorial office structure (*e.g.*, horizontal or vertical case assignment, specialty units) affect outcomes? Does the experience level of a prosecutor affect outcomes? What type of prosecutorial training is most effective? Which recruitment and hiring models and policies are most effective?

If a prosecutor's office is interested in participating but does not have a research partner, and likewise – if a researcher has an idea for a research project but does not have a prosecution partner – LJAF may attempt to help coordinate and facilitate those relationships. More details are included in the Requests for Proposals that follows.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Randomized Controlled Trials Designed to Build Policy-Important Evidence About “What Works” To Improve Prosecutorial Outcomes

- I. **Overview:** We plan to fund several RCTs, assuming we receive a sufficient number of high-quality submissions, and we encourage applicants to use cost-efficient approaches (as discussed below) to enable us to fund a greater number of RCTs. Submissions must involve some aspect of criminal prosecution in the United States. Proposals will be reviewed by a panel comprised of experts in both criminal justice policy and RCT evaluation.
- II. **Application Process and Selection Criteria:**

A. The following table shows the requested application materials and timeline:

<u>Stage of application process</u>	<u>Date</u>
All prospective applicants are asked to submit a letter of interest (maximum three pages)	Deadline: December 15, 2016
Applicants will be notified of whether they are invited to submit a full proposal (full proposals must be invited)	January 15, 2016
Invited applicants submit a full proposal (maximum six pages)	Deadline: March 15, 2017
Applicants will be notified of whether they have been selected for award	April 30, 2017
Grants will be awarded	Approximately June 2017

- B. **Letters of interest and invited full proposals should address each of the selection criteria below, within three pages (for the letter) and six pages (for the proposal).** Applicants may use their own format, with single or double spacing, and an 11 point font or larger. The page limit does not include attached letters or other documents specifically requested in this RFP. Please submit all items via email to ProsecutionRCTRFP@arnoldfoundation.org.

C. **Selection Criteria:**

For the letter of interest: While we ask applicants to address all four selection criteria below, we do not expect applicants to have finalized all aspects of the study design and partnership agreements; therefore, reviewers will focus more on the other two criteria – “importance” and “experienced researcher” – in determining which applicants to invite to submit a full proposal.

For the invited full proposal: Reviewers will consider whether all four criteria are satisfied.

➤ **IMPORTANCE:** Is the applicant proposing to evaluate an intervention –

- **That is backed by highly-promising evidence, suggesting it could produce sizable impacts on outcomes of recognized criminal justice policy importance** – such as crime rates, incarceration rates, recidivism, community-prosecutor relations, fairness, government expenditures, and/or post-incarceration employment and earnings. For example, we specifically

encourage proposals seeking to replicate findings from prior rigorous evaluations that are especially promising but not yet conclusive (*e.g.*, due to only short-term follow-up, a single-site study design, and/or matched comparison groups but not randomization). As a threshold condition for “highly promising” evidence, proposals should show that the intervention can be or (preferably) has been successfully delivered under real-world implementation conditions.

– or –

- **For which there are other compelling reasons to evaluate its effectiveness – *e.g.*, it is, or soon will be, widely implemented with significant taxpayer investment**, and its impact on its targeted outcomes is currently unknown; or it is a promising low-cost strategy that could readily be implemented on a large scale if found effective.

Please note that, to meet this criterion, it is not sufficient to establish that the study addresses an important problem; applicants must also present compelling reasons to evaluate the specific intervention.

- **EXPERIENCED RESEARCHER: Does the applicant’s team include at least one researcher in a key substantive role who has previously carried out a well-conducted RCT?** A well-conducted RCT is one with low sample attrition, sufficient sample size, close adherence to random assignment, and valid outcome measures and statistical analyses. To address this criterion, applicants should provide reports from prior RCTs that the researcher has conducted (please send them as email attachments, no more than two reports in all). Reviewers will rely primarily on these reports in assessing this selection criterion.
- **STUDY DESIGN: Is the applicant’s proposed RCT design valid?** In other words, does it have a sufficiently large sample (as shown through a power analysis) and other elements needed to generate credible evidence about the intervention’s impact on one or more targeted outcomes of high criminal justice policy importance? We strongly encourage designs that measure such outcomes in both the short and longer term, as appropriate for the type of intervention and study, to determine whether the effects endure long enough to constitute meaningful improvement in individual and/or community well-being. Reviewers, in assessing an applicant’s proposed design, will use [Key Items to Get Right When Conducting an RCT in Social Policy](#) as a reference.

Applicants, as part of their discussion of this criterion, should specify the study’s primary outcome(s) of interest, how the outcome(s) will be measured and over what length of time, and what analyses are planned (*e.g.*, any subgroups to be examined, regression methods to be used).

- **PARTNERS: Does the applicant’s team include all parties needed to perform the RCT?** Examples of necessary parties include: researcher(s), an agency delivering the intervention, and, if needed, an agency housing the administrative data that will be used to measure outcomes (*e.g.*, arrest records). To verify the existence of such partnerships, the reviewers will look for attached letters or other communication showing, for example, that (i) an agency that delivers the intervention has agreed to participate in the study, including random assignment; and (ii) a data agency has agreed to provide the researcher(s) with access to the appropriate administrative data.

If an applicant does not have a prosecutorial partner at the letter of interest stage, upon request, and at its sole discretion, LJAF may assist the applicant in creating such a partnership. Likewise, if a prosecutor has an intervention that they would like to study, but does not have a research partner, upon request, and at its sole discretion, LJAF may assist in creating such a partnership.

D. Other items to include in the letter of interest and invited full proposal:

- 1. Applicants should specify the amount of funding requested,** and (for the full proposal only) attach a one-page project budget (specific form will be provided to full proposal applicants). To reduce study costs, we encourage the use of administrative data to measure study outcomes such as arrests and incarcerations, wherever feasible, in lieu of more expensive original data collection. In addition, if any implementation research is proposed to complement the RCT, we suggest streamlined approaches that do not greatly increase the overall study cost. If additional funding from other sources is needed to carry out the study, we request that the applicant's budget show (i) the total study cost, and (ii) the portion of that cost to be covered by LJAF. We also ask that the applicant include an attached letter or other communication showing that the additional funding will be in place prior to LJAF's grant award.
- 2. LJAF allows for project-related overhead expenses** such as salaries, benefits, equipment, supplies, and travel to be included in direct costs; however, LJAF will only provide funding for indirect costs, up to a 10% limit, if extenuating circumstances exist and have been preapproved.
- 3. Applicants should specify the proposed recipient of the grant award, which typically will be a tax-exempt organization** (*e.g.*, nonprofit organization, university, or governmental unit).
- 4. Applicants should briefly address how their study meets recognized ethical standards for research with human subjects.**

III. What to Expect in the Grant Agreement: Awardees will be asked, as a condition of award, to –

- **Pre-register the study**, on the Open Science Framework (OSF) [website](#), and upload a copy of the research and analysis plan in their proposal.
- **Provide us with brief phone or email updates on the study's progress on a quarterly basis, and before any key decisions that could materially affect the study's design or implementation.**
- **Submit concise reports on the impact findings at appropriate intervals.** These reports should make it easy for readers to see the main results and gauge their credibility (*e.g.*, by showing the similarity of the treatment and control groups in pre-program characteristics, the amount of sample attrition, and the statistical significance of the impact findings).

- and –

- **Make their datasets and related materials** (*e.g.*, survey instruments, code used to clean and analyze datasets) **publicly available on the OSF site.** Applicants will be asked to do this within one year of the last data collection, and only to the extent allowed under any confidentiality/privacy protections. [Note: This list previews the main research-related requirements that will be included in the grant agreement but is not an exhaustive list of the conditions of the award.]

IV. Questions? Please email Peter Katz, Director of Criminal Justice (pkatz@arnoldfoundation.org). He may also be reached by phone at (212) 430-3624.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Innovative Proposals Designed to Build Policy-Important Evidence About “What Works” To Improve Prosecutorial Outcomes

- I. **Overview:** Our Innovation Tier is designed to support feasibility testing for highly promising ideas that are either not yet ready for an RCT, or for which an RCT cannot be conducted. Instead of asking whether an intervention is effective, this tier provides funding to answer whether an approach can be implemented with fidelity to a model in a real-world community setting and whether outcomes of interest can be measured reliably. The ultimate goal of the Innovation Tier is to prepare such interventions for an RCT that can be seamlessly conducted after successful feasibility testing. Interventions that demonstrate success in achieving fidelity to a model in a real-world setting and can measure key outcomes of interest will be good candidates for follow-on RCT grants from LJAF.

II. Application Process and Selection Criteria:

A. The following table shows the requested application materials and timeline:

<u>Stage of application process</u>	<u>Date</u>
All prospective applicants are asked to submit a letter of interest (maximum three pages)	Deadline: December 15, 2016
Applicants will be notified of whether they are invited to submit a full proposal (full proposals must be invited)	January 15, 2016
Invited applicants submit a full proposal (maximum six pages)	Deadline: March 15, 2017
Applicants will be notified of whether they have been selected for award	April 30, 2017
Grants will be awarded	Approximately June 2017

- B. Letters of interest and invited full proposals should address each of the selection criteria below, **within three pages (for the letter) and six pages (for the proposal)**. Applicants may use their own format, with single or double spacing, and an 11 point font or larger. The page limit does not include attached letters or other documents specifically requested in this RFP. Please submit all items via email to ProsecutionInnovationRFP@arnoldfoundation.org.

C. Selection Criteria:

For the letter of interest: While we ask applicants to address all four selection criteria below, we do not expect applicants to have finalized all aspects of the study design and strategy for a follow-up RCT; therefore, reviewers will focus more on the other two criteria – “importance” and “team” (with particular attention to the experience of the researchers – as we also understand that applicants may not have finalized all aspects of the partnership agreements) – in determining which applicants to invite to submit a full proposal.

For the invited full proposal: Reviewers will consider whether all four criteria are satisfied.

- **IMPORTANCE:** Is the applicant proposing to implement an intervention –

- **That targets outcomes of recognized prosecutorial policy importance**, such as crime rates, incarceration rates, recidivism, community-prosecutor relations, fairness, government expenditures, and/or post-incarceration employment and earnings.
- **That is supported by compelling logic, which is informed by the most relevant and rigorous evidence available, that the intervention has the potential to produce large impacts on the target area.**

➤ **STUDY DESIGN:** Will the applicant's proposed feasibility study design –

- **Deliver an intervention at a small or modest scale in a real-world context** (*e.g.*, prosecutorial office, unit, court, etc.).
- **Document the key elements of the intervention** (including the program model, training, supervision, and cost) so that future practitioners and researchers will be able to replicate it.
- **Collect data to show whether the intervention was successfully delivered, in close adherence to its key elements** (*e.g.*, what tasks were performed to implement the intervention and how closely did those tasks match the model, which people were involved in each intervention task, and how widespread/intense was the intervention among the population targeted; for service-delivery interventions, the data should show who appeared, who received the targeted amount of services, and who completed the program).
- **Measure proximal outcomes** to assess whether the intervention may be affecting the elements of behavior the intervention seeks to change (*e.g.*, prosecutorial or judicial decision-making).
- **Demonstrate the ability to measure ultimate outcomes of interest for those receiving the intervention** that could be used to compare a treatment and control group if the project goes forward to an RCT (*e.g.*, having in place structures to document recidivism, health, education, and employment for the individuals treated by the intervention).

➤ **TEAM:** Does the applicant's team include all parties needed to conduct a feasibility study that can transition to an RCT (if applicable)? Such parties include:

- An experienced practitioner or agency leader who has successfully implemented an innovative intervention in a real-world setting, with documented adherence to the intervention's key elements.
- One or more researchers who have previously (1) conducted implementation studies and documented key elements of a program model for use in replication studies; and (2) carried out a well-conducted RCT (an RCT with low sample attrition, sufficient sample size, and valid outcome measures and statistical analyses) and who will help the team to design the feasibility study so that it can flow seamlessly into an RCT.
- Personnel familiar with agency administrative data who can assist researchers in accessing and understanding the data, if such data will ultimately be needed to measure RCT outcomes.

Note: To verify the existence of such a team, the review panel will look for attached letters or other communication showing, for example, that (a) an appropriate agency that delivers the intervention

has agreed to participate in the study; and (b) a data agency has agreed to provide the researcher(s) with access to the administrative data needed to measure study outcomes.

If an applicant does not have a prosecutorial partner at the letter of interest stage, upon request, and at its sole discretion, LJAF may assist the applicant in creating such a partnership. Likewise, if a prosecutor has an intervention that they would like to study, but does not have a research partner, upon request, and at its sole discretion, LJAF may assist in creating such a partnership.

- **STRATEGY FOR FOLLOW-UP RCT:** Does the applicant's proposal describe a strategy for transitioning to an RCT, including a statement of approval from the parties mentioned above that an RCT is possible given successful implementation? Or, if an RCT would not be ethically feasible, does the applicant's proposal sufficiently detail why it is not possible and why the suggested strategy is optimal?

D. Other items to include in the letter of interest and invited full proposal:

1. **Applicants should specify the amount of funding requested**, and (for the full proposal only) attach a one-page project budget (specific form will be provided to full proposal applicants). LJAF allows for project-related overhead expenses such as salaries, benefits, equipment, supplies, and travel to be included in direct costs; however, LJAF will only provide funding for indirect costs, up to a 10% limit, if extenuating circumstances exist and have been preapproved. To reduce study costs, we encourage the use of administrative data to measure study outcomes. If additional funding from other sources is needed to carry out the study, we request that the applicant's budget show (i) the total study cost, and (ii) the portion of that cost to be covered by LJAF; and include an attached letter or other communication showing that the additional funding will be in place prior to LJAF's grant award.
2. **Applicants should specify the proposed recipient of the grant award, which typically will be a tax-exempt organization** (*e.g.*, nonprofit organization, university, or governmental unit).
3. **Applicants should briefly address how their study meets recognized ethical standards for research with human subjects.**

III. What to Expect in the Grant Agreement: Awardees will be asked, as a condition of award, to –

- **Pre-register the study**, on the Open Science Framework (OSF) [website](#), and upload a copy of the research and analysis plan in their proposal.
- **Provide us with brief phone or email updates on the study's progress on a quarterly basis, and before any key decisions that could materially affect the study's design or implementation.**
- **Submit concise reports on the findings at appropriate intervals.** These reports should make it easy for readers to see the main results and gauge their credibility.

- and –

- **Make their datasets and related materials** (*e.g.*, survey instruments, code used to clean and analyze datasets) **publicly available on the OSF site.** Applicants will be asked to do this within one year of the last data collection, and only to the extent allowed under any confidentiality/privacy protections. [Note: This list previews the main research-related requirements that will be included in the grant agreement but is not an exhaustive list of the conditions of the award.]

IV. Questions? Please email Peter Katz, Director of Criminal Justice (pkatz@arnoldfoundation.org). He may also be reached by phone at (212) 430-3624.